

Networking: Trouble for new Microsoft OS?

August 8 2005

Microsoft Corp. is releasing a beta version of Windows Vista, its latest operating system -- said to be impervious to most network hackers -- and the accompanying server software is anticipated later this year, experts told UPI's Networking.

According to Microsoft, one of Vista's primary features is its network access protection. Often, worms and viruses attack an internal corporate network via mobile PCs -- and handhelds -- that lack the latest security updates or virus signatures. With Vista, mobile computing users will be prevented from linking to a corporate network until they have installed all of the latest security software and met other "security criteria," the company said in a statement.

In addition, Vista is providing outgoing -- as well as incoming -- filtering, which can be centrally managed. Microsoft said this allows network administrators to control which applications are allowed to communicate and which are to be blocked from communicating on the network. Controlling network access is one of the most important ways to mitigate security risk, the Microsoft statement said.

The new software, however, is already generating a lot of trouble for the Redmond, Wash., software developer.

An overseas hacker claims to have compromised a version of Vista already, belying the security claims of Microsoft. News reports have said the Austrian hacker published information online about Vista's vulnerabilities and encouraged other hackers to join in bringing the

system down.

Microsoft was quick to knock down the claims, however.

"These reports pose no risk for Microsoft customers," Stephen Toulouse, Microsoft's program manager, said in a posting on his blog, step.to.com/default/default.aspx. "Regarding the recent reports that the first Windows Vista virus has been discovered. Problem is, it hasn't. Someone wrote some proof of concept malicious scripts for a command shell technology code named 'Monad.' Monad isn't even included with Windows Vista!"

Other critics are sniping that the name Vista -- which was called Longhorn during development -- is confusing, because there are close to 200 other software products that use the same name. Some are complaining that Microsoft was lax in its intellectual-property due diligence in selecting the name.

Other industry insiders said Microsoft chose the new name to communicate to users the breadth of the technology.

"Without a doubt, the choice of the name Vista signals Microsoft's plans to highlight the possibilities that the software will be open to users, as previous Windows versions have used mere acronyms, such as XP, or dates (such as) Windows 98," said Jerald Estrin, a spokesman for the Millennium Group, an IT consultancy located near Miami. "In my opinion, Microsoft did less than a stellar job of marketing Windows XP. Although the acronym, according to industry insiders, was supposed to stand for 'experience,' users, by and large, did not get that message. The challenge now is to convince people that Vista is markedly better than XP."

At present, Windows holds a 90-percent market share in the desktop

market. Linux, the free operating system, is gaining ground continually, with Apple still relegated to niche status.

According to the Web site Winbeta.org, about 100,000 beta testers will receive access to Vista online this week, and they will be downloading the OS from servers in successive waves to minimize any downloading problems. One of the firms is Definition 6 in Atlanta, a "beta for the Vista operating system because of their close ties with Microsoft," said Becky Boyd, a spokeswoman for the company.

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